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An Open Letter to Fredericton's New City Council

Congratulations to the Mayor and all of the newly elected City Councillors!

I would also like to congratulate the outgoing council for starting Fredericton's Green Matters Campaign and helping Fredericton put climate change on the map 'here at home', and setting the 'First to Kyoto' six percent community greenhouse gas reduction goal by 2010.

Now the new council needs to build on this progress and look beyond meeting Kyoto targets, and work towards making Fredericton truly one of the leading communities in North America when it comes to addressing climate change. To put this in context, I suspect that the next round of international negotiations will require reductions of emissions well into the 30-50 percent range in the next 2-3 decades. As you can see, Kyoto will look like a walk in the park.

How can our city accomplish this feat? Here are three suggestions:

1. Green Development
2. Water Conservation
3. Transportation

The City of Fredericton needs bylaws that encourage green and sustainable developments and renovations. We need to raise the bar in Fredericton in terms of building and development requirements, so that none can operate successfully beneath the bar. This means building energy efficient structures, and using products that are energy and water efficient (windows, taps, heating systems, etc.) to build and renovate. We also need to raise the bar in terms of land-use and zoning policies in the city. We need to be tough and selective about what gets built, where it gets built and what tree cover and natural vegetation has to be removed to build it.

Sustainable and green development must be given equal weight in the decision making process as economic development if we truly want to be a community of the future. If we adhere to this, then we will truly realize the benefits of the 'green economy' - that sustainable development is economic development.

Believe it or not, about 35 percent of the greenhouse gas emissions in Fredericton are the result of energy used to move water – clean water and dirty water. Water just doesn't magically appear at your tap, it has to be pumped there and pumped away. The more water we use, the more energy is consumed.

Bylaws should call for more aggressive water conservation measures, such as low flow toilets, showerheads and aerators. Gray water and rainwater collection systems should become part of every day life. Water conservation can include incentives and disincentives (carrot and stick) to motivate people to

change. For example, a carrot might include incentives to install low flow products; and then a stick would be to increase water bills. Consider this - if water costs go up 10 percent, and as a result consumption goes down 10 percent then we have succeeded in reducing greenhouse gas emissions from moving water around town and treating it.

I moved back to Fredericton eight years ago from Toronto. In the first few years back I got many parking tickets. Why? Because the cost of parking in Fredericton is substantially less than in Toronto – so there was no financial disincentive to parking downtown or letting my meter run out. But imagine if the cost of parking doubled downtown? It may deter some of us from driving our car downtown and instead walk, bike or use public transit, therefore lowering congestion and reducing emissions from vehicles. It may also have the added economic benefit of more people remaining downtown during the workday versus running around town in the car to do errands – I wouldn't mind waging a bet that downtown businesses would benefit from this initiative. And to make it easier to commute downtown, an option is to put few park-and-ride bus stops around the city in places like New Maryland and Hanwell Road. With the price of gas expected to rise significantly in coming years – increased mass public transit will become a necessity.

Some of these changes may seem a bit 'out there' in Fredericton in 2008, but think a few years ahead and picture where we need to go to address climate change – some of these changes may not look so crazy after all. In conclusion City Council, please consider some of these thoughts. Continue to be a leader and look beyond Kyoto. Think 30 years ahead – our community needs your vision and commitment to really address climate change, and ensure that Fredericton remains well-positioned to tackle it 'right here at home'.

Thank you,

Peter Corbyn

Peter Corbyn is a Board member of The Climate Project – Canada, and a founder of www.earthinstitute.ca a not-for-profit organization that provides tools to help Canadian home owners, small businesses and large enterprises save energy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. In 2007 he was awarded the National Clean Air Day Award for Excellence in Energy Efficiency Outreach.